

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

2004 district audit process and proposals for its refinement

Applicable Statute(s) or Regulation(s):

703 KAR 5:120, 703 KAR 5:130

History/Background:

Existing Policy. KRS 158.6455 was substantially amended during the 1998 General Assembly to, among other things, establish an accountability index to classify whether schools had met their expected levels of improvement on the statewide assessment, with 1998-2000 to serve as the basis for the individual growth lines that would be established. Consequences were established for schools that failed to meet their threshold, including but not limited to the conduction of scholastic audits. The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) was charged with the responsibility for promulgating administrative regulations establishing the guidelines for scholastic audits, and was also given the authority to promulgate regulations establishing a system of district accountability. Pursuant to that authority, 703 KAR 5:120, Assistance for schools, guidelines for scholastic audits (Attachment A) and 702 KAR 5:130, School district accountability (Attachment B) set out the conditions that would give rise to school and district audits.

703 KAR 5:130, Section 5, (3) requires that if a school is classified as Level 3 for two (2) consecutive accountability cycles, the school district is subject to a district audit conducted by a district evaluation team. The team is required to review each of the areas outlined in Section 6 of the administrative regulation and the district's implementation of the previous accountability cycle's school support plan. The district audit team is also required to evaluate the district as to district responsibilities using the "Standards and Indicators for School Improvement", incorporated by reference in 703 KAR 5:120.

KDE Implementation Process:

The district audit process was created immediately after the school level audit process in the summer of 1999, when the regulations for both were crafted for approval by the Kentucky Board of Education. After the scholastic audit process for schools was piloted in the fall of 2000, the first draft of the district performance descriptors was written and disseminated with the school level performance descriptors, so that districts could begin to see their role in supporting low-performing schools. This draft document was first circulated to schools and districts in the winter of 2001. Several workshops were conducted around the state to show how the school and district descriptors worked in tandem to bring about whole school reform. This preliminary work was done in preparation for the first school level audits that, by regulation, were to be conducted in

the fall of 2002. The Kentucky Department of Education promoted the audit process to districts as a means of assisting their lowest performing schools prior to the imposition of sanctions in 2002.

A total of ten districts have undergone voluntary district audits, with eight of these occurring prior to the mandated district audit of Jefferson County this past winter. Lessons learned from these pilot district audits were applied to both process and protocol revisions that were completed prior to the first district audit conducted in Jefferson County in the winter of 2005.

Policy Issues:

From the experiences of the first official district audit, staff is seeking Board input on the following changes to improve the process and increase the impact on the district and schools that triggered the audit in the first place. The Board may wish to propose additional ideas to strengthen and increase the effectiveness of the process. No changes to existing regulations would be required to implement the proposed improvements.

1. ***Executive Summary*** - The software KDE developed is useful in generating the report for the audit team, but the current structure of the report is not the most effective in meeting the needs of the school, district, or interested community stakeholders. For example, the core of the report, “Summary of Next Steps” and the conclusion are buried 50+ pages into it.

To rectify this matter and make the most important messages obvious and easily accessible to professionals and lay people alike, each report will be introduced by an executive summary. (See Attachment C for a sample executive summary for the Jefferson County report.) The language in this summary will be direct and to the point.

2. ***Progress Tracking Grid*** - There needs to be more emphasis on change and implementation of the findings. Making recommendations is not enough.

To improve in this area a “Progress Tracking Grid” will be added to the report. This will provide guidance and expectations to district leadership on areas for improvement. Joint follow-up meetings between KDE and district staff to track progress will also help in this area. (See Attachment D for an example.) In order to better ensure public accountability, KDE will request progress checks be presented by district staff to their local board of education on a quarterly basis.

3. ***Monitoring*** - Especially in a large district with many district staff to interview and programs to review, it is easy to lose focus on the issue that triggered the audit: district support (or lack thereof) for repeating level 3 schools.

The district’s specific support plans for these particular schools need to be scrutinized closely by KDE staff and monitored on a regular basis.

4. ***District Audit Instrument*** – Staff will review and revise the district audit instrument to center around key district functions and leverage points.

5. *Possible Additional Changes* – As staff has conversations with Jefferson County Public Schools' leadership, other changes to the district audit instrument/process may be suggested and implemented.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Improving learning opportunities for all children will require more than individual talents or school-by-school efforts. It will demand system-wide strategies that touch every child in every school in every district across the Commonwealth. Substantial gains in student achievement will result only if we recognize that, to increase student achievement, we must improve instruction and commit the will and resources necessary to develop district-wide solutions. Without efforts to create success across school systems, far too many students will continue to languish. Mandatory and voluntary district audits can provide the plans and targets for this systemic improvement.

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Date:

June 2005